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## A SUGGESTIVE EXHIBITION OF DESIGNS.

THE wall-paper designs on view at the American Art Gallery, brought together by the liberal offer of Messrs. Warren, Fuller & Co., of over two thousand dollars in prizes, afford an interesting and instructive exhibition. With the inducements for competition perhaps one might reasonably have looked for a larger and better display, but it must be remembered that this is the first attempt at such an affair, and too much ought not to be expected. As it is, we are satisfied that it will be by no means barren of good results. About seventy designs were received, a third or more coming from France, England, and Germany, and forty-five have been hung. Had the number to choose from been larger, the standard of selection no doubt would have been severer. But for educational purposes the collection would not have served so well. Now, while it offers many opportunities for praise, it emphasizes some common faults in wall-paper decoration which should be pointed out so that they may be avoided in future.

Glancing at the array on the walls of the gallery we see the work of professionals and amateurs widely varying in excellence. In some of the exhibits we find original ideas, artistic ability in rendering them, but often inadequate skill in crystallizing them for mechanical execution. In others there is the neat, soulless, conventional labor of the professional designer; his work is good of its kind, but he dares not venture beyond the circumscribed limits of the workshop. Then there is the abortive effort of the painstaking artisan of some wall-paper factory; he knows what is mechanically necessary, and, if properly directed, will make a faultless paper, but it is evident he will never learn how to design one. In this candidate for honors there is much to respect; at least he knows his craft, and honestly strives to know more. But a person for whom we have no respect is the amateur who, without taste, imagination, knowledge, or skill, with the blind confidence of ignorance boldly enters the lists, hoping by "good luck" to carry off a prize.

Of the class first indicated there are several excellent examples on the east wall, which visitors generally, we think, will find the most charming in the exhibition. They are differently signed, but seem to be from the same hand. That this hand is not that of a workshop artist is evident, and yet we should say that the designs are not the essay of a novice in wall-paper decoration. One of them is a clever application of a marine motive. The dado shows fishes swimming amid seaweed; the "filling"—as the field is technically called—is the blue-green water seen through a silver net, and there is a frieze of shells and sea-weed. Borders of gold and silver fish-scales or of shells and weeds are effectively introduced to mark the divisions of the wall space. Another design of this group has for its motive a peony and foliage, treated broadly in Morris style, in delicate tones of rose, olive-green, and cream color, with large disks of gold, which in the frieze form a kind of nimbus for the flowers. Gold-leaf is scattered in irregular flakes with good effect over field and frieze.

But the cleverest design of this group is a decorative treatment of the bee-hive. The "filling" is a silver honeycomb with, at irregular but nicely calculated intervals, honey-cells of gold, and very lively and gorgeous bees are roaming at will in a charmingly natural way. The dado of metallic green is broken with a tangle of clover, gold disks, and more bees. The frieze is the only weak part of the design. The motive is the vertical section of a bee-hive, monotonously repeated. In commending this very clever design we say distinctly that we consider it quite unsuited for ordinary use. Those wonderful insects buzzing at one all day assuredly would not contribute to that sense of repose which, as a rule, a good wall-paper should afford. Living objects treated naturally may only be introduced into flat decoration under the most rigorous restrictions, but for a lounging room in a country house, or for a smoking-room, or even a lady's boudoir in a town house, we believe the introduction of such a pretty fanciful paper as this would be not only permissible but absolutely delightful.

Quite differently, however, do we think of the marine designs signed "Væ victis." "Woe to the vanquished," indeed! Woe to him who makes an essay and fails, when another, using the same theme, succeeds. The dark-green dado of this paper is good, with its Japanese treatment of swimming fish, made decorative

by the broken horizontal lines of gold, suggesting water. But the frieze of sea-plants is weak, and the "filling" representing water, with scores of uncanny-looking objects darting to and fro—the vermin of the sea—is a woeful exhibition of bad taste. Compare this with the marine design noticed above. The author of that knew better than to make an aquarium of his wall.

Of the papers of unmistakable professional origin the most striking is that signed "Perseverance." It is the only wall-paper accompanied by a ceiling design, in fact no other design for ceiling decoration is exhibited. The fir, almond and bamboo are the very Japanese motives selected for the wall, and the almond blossom alone for the ceiling. These materials are treated in a Japanesque—we can hardly say Japanese—manner. The work evidences much technical knowledge, but the coloring is so disagreeable that at a first glance one is apt to withhold from the design its just due. The "filling" and the ceiling would, if better colored, make excellent papers. The dado and frieze are too crowded, and the former we certainly think would be improved by the omission of the flying cranes.

The design with the motto, "Industrie, progrès"—a Neo-Greek motive—also the work of a professional, is rich and serviceable. That signed "Spes" is serviceable and not rich. The gorgeous one, resplendent in crimson, gold, and blue, with the motto "Courage wins everything"—it looks like the work of a carpet designer—is very rich, but, we should hope, not very serviceable. There is little, indeed, in this design to commend, although we feel that it is just the sort of thing which will be produced and will have a large sale. "Tempus" sends a clever adaptation of the thistle, arranged with much ingenuity for frieze, "filling," and dado. The coloring is not pleasant, but the manufacturer could make good use of the design.

We come often upon an exhibit excellent in parts but wanting as a whole. One with a didactic motto, "A wall-paper must not be a picture," has a "filling" of a good though not very original tapestry design; the dado which goes with it is a bad application of an architectural motive. Another with graceful arabesques in Renaissance style, signed "New Columbia," is also weak as to the dado. The same must be said of the design of dandelion seed-globes on a gold ground, and of the graceful design of wild roses with leaves on a low green and russet ground, the whole seen through a metal lattice work. Among such unequal work as is shown in these, however, the manufacturer will still find much that will be suitable for production. The dado for practical purposes is of little consequence. Persons of taste are beginning to see, what we have frequently pointed out, that it is absurd to break up a wall of average height by divisions which must contract it to the eye. The frieze is often a desirable finish to a wall of fair height, but the purpose of the dado is generally filled by the natural disposition in a room of furniture, mantel-piece, and book-shelves.

There are several designs which, while unavailable as they stand, may be utilized to great advantage by a practiced hand. Prominent among these are two by "Sub rosa." His lily design for "filling" is particularly good. The decorative effect of Arabic characters, applied to a frieze, is illustrated in the design of "Spera et fidelis" [sic]. The coloring is undesirably original, but the designs for both frieze and "filling" are strikingly suggestive of some plates in "L'Art Arabe."

As has already been remarked, one of the advantages of an exhibition of this kind is that it emphasizes what is to be avoided as well as what is to be desired. To see all possible faults combined the reader is referred to the labored nonsense of the exhibitor with the somewhat too confident motto, "Help yourself and Heaven will help you." For faults which may be conquered after some lessons from a practical designer, we notice the feebly executed design of "Animus tanem idem." An example of woefully misdirected originality is the design signed "C flowers;" the dado, which should be the strong or structural portion of the wall, is composed of bands of tawdry "pinked" tissue paper on a ground of brown shavings, the stiff frieze having a narrow band to match the dado, with the addition of a fringe of shavings. Another design we can compare only to an elaborately decorated window-shade, with its tasselled frieze and wonderfully fringed dado; there are about thirty horizontal divisions on this remarkable exhibit. Perhaps, though, there is nothing worse in the gallery than the exhibit of peacock and ostrich feathers stiffly disposed for a "filling," a sort of brown

brick arrangement for a dado, and imitation silk ruchings for a frieze. These are no school-girls' efforts, but are evidently the carefully finished work of trained hands but wildly erratic brains.

On the whole, the exhibition must be held to mark a distinct step in wall-paper designing in this country, and it is to be hoped that the liberal example of the promoters of the enterprise will be followed by leading houses in other branches of art manufacture.

P. S.—Since the writing of the above the prizes have been awarded as follows: First prize, \$1000, to Mrs. T. M. Wheeler, for the beehive design; second prize, \$500, to Miss Ida F. Clark, for the silver-net marine design; third prize, \$300, to Miss Caroline Townsend ("Sub rosa"), for her design of lilies; and the fourth prize, \$200, to Miss Dora Wheeler, for the peony design. It is worthy of remark that all the prizes have been won by women.

AMONG the many clever young artists of the Salma-gundi Sketch Club there is probably none of greater promise than Mr. George W. Edwards. It is hardly necessary for us to speak of his charmingly executed little drawing, printed on another page, for it tells its own story. But we may say that, hastily dashed off as it was (at our request), it shows remarkable facility and spirit, as indeed does all his work that we have seen. Mr. Edwards is one of those industrious, earnest art students who are bound to succeed. He is already favorably known by his contributions to some of the illustrated magazines, and by his black-and-white exhibition sketches. We shall watch with interest the progress of his artistic career.

## My Note Book.



RESUMING his duties at the Metropolitan Museum after his absence in Europe during the summer, General Di Cesnola is now arranging the new loan collection of pictures, and the latest gifts to the Museum. The most important of the latter is the Charvet collection of antique glass, the generous gift of Mr.

Marquand. Mr. J. Jackson Jarves also has made a present of antique glass to the Museum. I have not seen it, but believe that it is not claimed to be remarkable. The Charvet collection has long been known to connoisseurs as very desirable for a museum, and our New York institution is to be congratulated on acquiring it. To say, though, as The Evening Post does, that with these additions to that bought of General Di Cesnola, the Metropolitan Museum will have "the finest collection of ancient glass in the world," is manifestly absurd; for one naturally calls to mind the unapproachable collection at the British Museum, to which have been added the Slade and Henderson collections. Why indulge in exaggerations? The facts are strong enough.

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And why speak of M. Charvet as a "collector," when it is well known that he is a dealer, and has long had this collection for sale. He is a dealer just as General Di Cesnola was a dealer when he sold him some of the very pieces now in this collection, and when he sold to the Oxford Museum the antique glass of the second Cesnola collection, which, by the way, is said to be much superior to that which he sold to our New York Museum. It is time that we heard the last of the snobbish distinction it is attempted to draw between a "dealer" and a *ci-devant* dealer, promoted to be Director. The collection surely can be no less valuable because Mr. Marquand bought it of a dealer.

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IT is not wise to let one distinguished firm of decorators complete a noble saloon in a particular style, and then call in the aid of another distinguished firm to try an improvement in the way of a ceiling. This was done recently at a famous Fifth Avenue mansion, and the result naturally was a failure. It has been more than hinted that the new men purposely decorated the